

wanted me. And I knew she might be frightened, too. (*She gropes her way to the stairs.*) And I felt my way to the stairs in the dark, trying not to wake anyone. (*Calling softly.*)

Zara! Zara! Where are you? Zara!

It's me, Lucy. Don't be frightened. (*To audience.*) And then it happened. I was halfway down the stairs when – there was this tremendous flash of lightning and this huge clap of thunder and I must have caught my foot on the stairs in the dark because the next thing I knew I was falling...falling...

*She falls downstairs. As she does so, with a cry...*

ZARA!

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## THE CHAMPION OF PARIBANOU

by Alan Ayckbourn

*The Champion of Paribanou* was first performed at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round, Scarborough in November 1996.

*This play for children is set in the mythical and mystical East. It deals with questions of good and evil. Prince Ahmed is in love with Murgandh, the vizier's tomboyish daughter. Princess Nouromnihar has been ordered by her father to marry Ahmed or one of his brothers. As none of them want the match, they have formed a plot to gain time. Each of the princes is to go on a quest to bring back a gift to Nouromnihar, which she will subsequently reject. Ahmed's quest leads him to the Mountain of Storms. Here he meets Paribanou, a young maiden, who tells him her story in the following speech.*

*Accent: any.*

PARIBANOU: Sit down. We have much to talk about. But first I must explain a little. Do you like fairy tales, Ahmed?

Listen to this one. And pay attention. Once upon a time there were two children. A sister and a brother. Their mother had died when they were very young and as a result the brother's behaviour was often very wild. They were brought up by their father, a good and powerful wizard in the most happy of kingdoms. One day it happened that their father had to leave them in order to make a journey. He left them in the care of the servants and before he went he bade them to be good and well-behaved during his absence. If they were good, he said, when he returned he would reward them with wonderful